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THE NATURE OF THE EVENT IN LATE CAPITALISM

*Renata Salecl**

Late capitalism looks like a society that lacks political events. This society does not seem to face radical changes like revolution anymore, and there seems to be a radical inability to think through the alternatives to the democratic model of the organization of society that is operative in the developed world. With the lack of radical changes in today's developed world, one nonetheless can observe subtle ideological changes which deeply affect societies and individuals. Are these subtle ideological changes something that can account for what Alain Badiou calls an event and that delineates radical shifts in the organization of society and the individual?¹

In the attempt to tackle this dilemma, I will focus on a couple of ideological operations that dominate late capitalism. First, I will look at what kind of changes in the domain of fiction we observe in the domain of law. Second, I will analyze the subtle change from the discourse of rights to the discourse of choice that happened in the perception of reproduction. And third, I will look at the changes that pertain to the perception of subjectivity in late capitalism.

I. LAW WILL ALWAYS FIND YOU

If in the past, the media very much focused on detective novels and courtroom dramas, where crime was presented in a form of fiction,

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¹ Badiou lists among what historically counts as an event a rather diverse set: the French revolution of 1792, the meeting of Héloïse and Abélard, Galileo's creation of physics, Haydn's invention of the classical style. . . . But also the Cultural Revolution of China (1965-67), a personal amorous passion, the creation of Topos theory by the mathematician Grothendieck, the invention of the twelve-tone scale by Schoenberg.

See ALAIN BADIOU, *ETHICS: AN ESSAY ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF EVIL* 41 (2001).

today, with the emergence of the so-called reality TV, it looks as if for the public the most interesting are those crime investigations which have to do with resolving crimes that were truly committed. On American Court TV, which later became Tru TV, the most high-tech crime investigations are presented in the famous show *Forensic Files*. This show usually involves complicated crimes in which there seemed to be a great chance that the criminal would never be found. But with the help of highly developed forensic science, this is changing, and a criminal can be brought to court even many years after he or she committed the crime.²

The clear message behind these shows is “law will always find you”—it is only a matter of furthering the forensic science with new techniques to get even the most skilled criminal. One of the *Forensic Files* episodes presented a case of the murder of a poor single mother, Melisa, who had been sexually assaulted and murdered late in the evening when returning from the convenience store. Melisa’s body had been full of bruises, and there were clear marks of teeth bites on her skin. The police had no clue who might be the murderer until many months later, when, in another state, a policewoman was similarly assaulted by a stranger. In that case, the policewoman was also bitten on her body. The police established that both cases involved a ritualistic type of assault, which followed a particular kind of a pattern. After a detailed forensic analysis of the teeth bites, the police confirmed that both women had been bitten in their chins in a very similar way. From this fact a theory was established that the attacker got sexual satisfaction when he raped women and simultaneously looked them in their eyes. And in order to provoke a particular gaze from the woman, he would clam his teeth into her chin.

The main idea of *Forensic Files* is that science can uncover the secret of the criminal. No matter how smart he is or how skillfully he covers the traces of the crime, law will discover his secret. And what will give the secret away is usually a piece of bodily evidence which the suspect has no power to control. In the above-mentioned case, the criminal’s teeth are a unique feature, which will finally do him in, but in most cases nowadays this feature is DNA.

Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*,³ tries to figure out how society tries to regulate the aggressive impulses of the individuals. He thus says:

² On its Internet page, *Forensic Files* advertises with the following: “We resolve to give you more of the stories you love: unlikely perpetrators, crazy plot twists, forensic breakthroughs, and—of course—investigators who always get their man (or woman)!” See <http://www.forensicfiles.com> (last visited Feb. 18, 2008).

³ See SIGMUND FREUD, *CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS* 12 (Penguin Freud Library ed. 1991) (1930).

Civilization has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man's aggressive instincts and to hold the manifestations of them by psychical reaction-formations. Hence, therefore, the use of methods intended to incite people into identifications and aim-inhibited relationships of love, hence the restriction upon sexual life, hence too the ideal's commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself—a commandment which is really justified by the fact that nothing else runs so strongly counter to the original nature of man.⁴

But then Freud pessimistically concludes that these endeavors of civilization have not so far achieved very much. Civilization “hopes to prevent the crudest excesses of brutal violence by itself assuming the right to use violence against criminals, but the law is not able to lay hold of the more cautious and refined manifestations of human aggressiveness.”⁵

What kind of aggressiveness does the law have difficulty laying hold of? Invoking the theory of Jacques Lacan, we can say that it is a particular form of *jouissance* that the law cannot lay hold of and which constantly threatens civilization's attempts to control aggressive impulses. Shows like *Forensic Files* create the impression that new forensic technologies can easily tackle the *jouissance* of the criminal. It looks as if the forensic science further perfects its ways of “capturing” the way a particular criminal's *jouissance* is played out in a criminal act, and the law in the future will have an easy job dealing with crime and social transgression.

Lacanian psychoanalysis stresses that there is a gap between the real and its imaginary representations. One can view ideology as imaginary in that it creates a series of representations in which the violence of the primal social relationships (exploitation, oppression, etc.) is masked. Badiou points out that the violence of the real is efficient only as long as there exists a gap between the effects of the real and their dominant representations. These representations are a symptom of some real, a symptom where we have subjective localization as misrecognition. Invoking the term “symptom,” Badiou makes a reference to Lacan and points out the similarity between Marxism and psychoanalysis. For the latter, the Ego is perceived as an imaginary construction in which there is an element of misrecognition, which masks the ruptures of the real with fictions and montages.

What is the distinction between the real and the semblance? Badiou makes a provocative thesis that:

the real, conceived in its contingent absoluteness, is never enough real in order to not be able to be suspected of semblance. The passion for the real is also, of necessity, suspicion. Nothing can

⁴ *Id.* at 59.

⁵ *Id.*

attest that the real is the real, only the system of fiction wherein it plays the role of the real.⁶

Badiou also points out that one is suspicious when there is an absence of any formal criteria, which will allow distinguishing real from the semblance. In this context, then, showing the split between artificiality and the real can also become the main principle of artificiality. In the case of the before-mentioned *Forensic Files*, the advertisement on the web page says: “Not reality. Actuality.” This saying seems to distance the show from the “fakeness” of today’s reality shows, which clearly show a staged reality, by assuming that “actuality” connotes something more real than reality.

While the media is full of new ideas of how to capture criminals by analyzing how they “really” do it, at the same time the ideology of late capitalism incites new forms of identifications, which are actually opening the doors for new aggression—aggression to others and aggression to oneself.

II. VIOLENCE OF CHOICE

Event in Badiou’s philosophy brings about not only changes in the rules of appearance, but also changes in the intensity of existence. What kind of changes of the latter can we observe in late capitalism?

Jacques Lacan, in his lecture in Milan in 1971, pointed out that capitalism transforms the proletarian slave into a free consumer. Using Badiou’s terminology we can also say that a certain perception of the “minimality of existence” has been turned into “maximality”—if the proletarian seemed to be embedded into his or her conditions and constrained by them, the free consumer seems to be capable of freely changing the very conditions of his or her existence. The proletarian’s constrained, minimal existence is in the case of the free consumer turned into a maximality of possibility.

Let me exemplify this ideological operation. In a New York bookstore, I recently saw a book entitled *All About Me*.⁷ Looking inside, I realized that it was almost empty—on each page there were only a couple of questions about my likes, dislikes, life-plans, memories etc., and a space provided in which the answers could be filled in. Those empty spaces illustrate perfectly the dominant ideology in the developed world, which perceives the individual as the ultimate master of his or her life. In today’s consumer society the individual is not only perceived as someone who endlessly needs to make choices about

⁶ See ALAIN BADIOU, *THE CENTURY* 52 (Albert Toscano trans., Polity Press 2007) (2005).

⁷ See PHILIPP KEEL, *ALL ABOUT ME* (1998).

various consumer products, the individual is also supposed to look at his or her own life as a particular “consumer object.”

One can observe a variety of such subtle reinterpretations in today’s society. One such concept is, for example, “development.” While in a particular context this concept might have a “positive” connotation, in another, it can be a cover-up for new forms of exploitation. (If, for example, governments are stressing the need for development in the Amazon jungle, this most often means the need to cut more trees and exploit nature there.)

A particular kind of reinterpretation is also happening with the concept of human rights. In late capitalism, the discourse of human rights took a rather surprising turn. On the one hand, with human rights it happened, similarly as with feminism, that its basic premises became accepted to such a degree that it started to function as a particular type of obviousness. But on the other hand, this obviousness took away the edge that the discourse of human rights used to have in the past. This shift can be most clearly observed in post-socialist countries. In the public discourse, the mention of human rights is almost non-existent, but at the same time, if people were to be asked what they think about them, they would have taken the main ideas of human rights for granted. There is also a similarity here in the case of the discourse of feminism. While the majority of women in post-socialist countries (even highly educated women, for example) would not easily call themselves feminists, they would take for granted the need for gender equality in all domains of their lives.

Louis Althusser⁸ links ideology to people’s perception of the way society functions as something obvious. In order to understand how individuals are under the grips of a particular ideology, one needs to discard this veil of obviousness and look at how a particular organization of society requires a particular ideology to perpetuate itself. In this context, the way late capitalism encourages people’s perception that they are free consumers in all aspects of their lives deeply affects the way they nowadays perceive human rights. In a variety of discourses, rights have in a particular way been replaced with choices. This is especially obvious in the way we regard reproductive rights and the right to abortion, in particular.

In post-socialism, the personal decision to have children or not became, in the discourse of the nationalist right-wing parties, presented as the dilemma between the right and the wrong choice. A woman was perceived to be free to choose to be a mother or a career woman under the assumption that choosing motherhood is the right choice. In Croatia, President Tudjman even went so far as to propose that the

⁸ See LOUIS ALTHUSSER, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation*, in *LENIN AND PHILOSOPHY AND OTHER ESSAYS* (Ben Brewster trans., 1971).

states should limit the right to abortion in order to enhance another right—the one to have a desired number of children.

Communists were often very creative in their interpretation of rights and choices. For example, when Romanian president Ceausescu was asked in an interview for *Time Magazine* if the ban that he imposed on Romanians' travel abroad was not a violation of human rights, he responded by stressing that this prohibition actually supports another right—the right to live in one's own country!

A quite similar reinterpretation of the right choice and the right to choose was going on at the time of the American struggles over abortion rights. In the mid-1970s an important shift happened in the U.S. when the Supreme Court decided that abortion costs cannot be covered by Medicare. If the public discourse at first used the term the “right to abortion,” very soon the “right to choose” became the dominant way in which the public was discussing abortion issues. This shift from rights to choices in an important way brought the idea of consumerism into the abortion debates.

Nowadays, psychoanalysts are observing a change in the formulation of the quest to have a child among middle-aged women. The question of whether or not one should have children often involves deep dilemmas for the prospective parent. He or she might very much question the nature of his or her desire for reproduction. A career woman might be perturbed with the anxieties about the future of her career, a married woman might question how having a child will affect her marriage, and a single woman might deeply fear how she will cope with a child alone. These troubles with the desire for the child might push someone to undergo psychoanalysis and try to figure out whether she truly wishes to have a child at all. Such a person might in her analysis deal a lot with the question of how she was desired by her parents in the first place. This question can, of course, open up a traumatic acknowledgment that one has not been desired at all and that parents actually, in an open or hidden way, rejected the child. In order to not make the same mistake, a prospective parent therefore hopes to explore her desire for the child.

Psychoanalysts are nowadays observing a particular shift from desire to demand. Instead of having patients on the couch who are uncertain about their desire, they deal with patients who demand the child under any circumstances. Quite often such a demand is formulated in the language of rights. A woman might say: “I want to have a child. It is my right to have one, but my husband is preventing me from fulfilling this right.” Sometimes it is a doctor who is perceived as obstructing the woman's right.

The ideology of choice influenced this turn from desire to demand, but the question now is what kind of an effect this will have on children.

It is one thing to deal with the question of how one was desired by parents and quite another when one faces the dilemma of how one was “demanded.” The woman who “demands” to have a child might very well perceive that the child will make her complete. She might have difficulty separating herself from the child, which in turn might be very suffocating for the child.

III. CHOOSING ONESELF?

In times when rational choice theory seems to be penetrating many aspects of our lives, one can also observe an emergence of the idea that life is about self-fulfillment. The latter almost appears like a new human right.

The idea that one needs to find self-fulfillment or that one needs to “become oneself,” which is the slogan of many media advertisings, however, does not appear to be an easy task. A quick look at *The New York Times*’ bestseller list gives us the impression that people are spending a lot of money and time on searching for advice on how to become themselves. Books with titles such as *The Secret*, *Change Your Thought: Change Yourself*, *You: The Owner’s Manual*, *Now Discover Your Strengths*, *Heaven is Real*, and *Reposition Yourself*, try to fulfill this urgent quest for figuring out what one’s life should look like. On the Internet, various astrology sites provide free samples of insight into the “real you.” On television people are advised how to undergo a total body makeover, and in all domains of one’s private and public life one can hire coaches to assist in the pursuit of the most desirable life.

Following this kind of advice, however, does not bring contentment to individuals but, rather, increases their anxiety and insecurity. A writer, Jennifer Niesslein,⁹ who was mildly discontent with her life decided to buy all kinds of self-help books, which were supposed to help her find more happiness and self-fulfillment. After a year of religiously following advice on how to lose weight, how to unclutter her house, how to be a better parent and partner, and how to find more serenity in her overall existence, Niesslein started suffering from serious panic attacks and in general became less and less contented with her life. Not only did working on herself take up all her time, but she was also not enjoying the results she got: a spotless kitchen, three cooked meals, etc. Even the weight that she lost through strenuous exercise, she quickly put back on again. When Niesslein was asked why people follow these books, she referred to the fact that with life stresses, if you can turn to someone else and they’ll tell you what to do,

⁹ See JENNIFER NIESSLEIN, *PRACTICALLY PERFECT IN EVERY WAY* (2007).

it's comforting.

How is it that in the developed world, the apparent increase of choices through which people can supposedly fashion and tailor their lives does not lead to more satisfaction but, rather, contributes to greater anxiety, greater feelings of inadequacy and guilt? And, why, in order to appease this anxiety, are people willing to follow some random advice that they get from the writers of self-help books? By turning to these books it looks as if people are quite eager to have choices taken away from them, since most of the fashionable self-help books are full of orders and to-do lists that are designed to help people find more contentment in their lives. Some psychoanalysts have observed a particular kind of obsessive behavior that emerged among the followers of the popular internet site "FLYlady.com." (FLY stands for "Finally Loving Yourself"!)

Readers of this site are encouraged to keep a journal of their daily tasks and to follow detailed advice on how to organize their lives and unclutter their space, bodies, emotions, and relationships. Paradoxically, some readers find a particular enjoyment in the very feeling of guilt that comes from always failing to complete the proposed task.

The individual is today addressed by capitalist ideology as someone for whom enjoyment is without limit, i.e., he or she is perceived as someone who can endlessly push the boundaries of pleasure and who can also satisfy his or her ever expanding desires. Paradoxically, however, many people do not find satisfaction in a presumably limitless society but often end up on the path of self-destruction. It looks as if free consumers end by consuming themselves. The escalation of various types of self-harm—anorexia, bulimia, and the huge problem with addictions in today's society—definitely supports this point. (Looking at how celebrities like Britney Spears are daily checking themselves in and out of rehab centers and how the media promotes the lifestyle of excessively thin, forever partying, rich celebrities, clearly shows that the push to limitless enjoyment can have dear consequences for the individual.)

In his book, *The Century*, Badiou warns that when enjoyment becomes what everyone is after in life, i.e., when enjoyment becomes an imperative, people start enjoying horrors.¹⁰ This opens up the era of gladiators, real-time torture, and an era in which we might even find nostalgia for the political types of killings of the previous century. One can also add that the ideology of "working on oneself" prevents social change. It pushes the subject to feel guilty. Instead of being able to engage in a process of social critique, the subject endlessly engages in a self-critique.

¹⁰ See BADIOU, *supra* note 6.

Although we might feel overwhelmed by consumer choices and the push to turn our lives into an art project, we should not forget the problem is not that (happily) people have choice, but that a particular idea of rational choice which came from the domain of economics has been glorified today as the ultimate understanding about what choice is all about. It is this idea of rational choice that, for example, influences various new-age movements that teach people how, with the sheer power of their beliefs, they can change their lives.

In a paradoxical way today the idea of choice is “sold” together with the idea of self-prohibition. For example, people are, on the one hand, encouraged to consume endlessly, but on the other, they are also sold the ideology of how to simplify their lives. All the advice on how to “unclutter” our lives and bodies follows the idea that we need to be more organized, more efficient, and more in control. Popular books with titles such as *How the Rich Get Thin* suggest that the only solution to weight gain is total control. Women from posh New York neighborhoods with whom an average American girl is supposed to identify apparently plan everything in their lives to perfection.

IV. LOVE AS CHOICE

Badiou takes love as an event, which radically unsettles a person’s life and demands a person to look at him or herself and his or her place in the world in a radically new way. In today’s ideology, however, love is perceived as a matter of choice. The individual who is perceived to be in control of emotions and always capable of making rational choices is also supposed to be able to direct his or her love relationships.

First, love in eras of high individualism is supposed to have as its basis self-love. And second, love of another is, on the one hand, perceived as a matter of choice and, on the other, as something beyond it. The society which values the idea of romantic love, of course, relies on the perception that one should be free to choose a romantic partner. But at the same time, inextricable from the very idea of romantic love is the long-standing truism that falling in love is not a rational matter. The tragic love stories are all about the suffering of two people who cannot help loving each other.

A person often loves in the other what the other does not have—a sublime object that the lover perceives in the beloved and out of which the lover creates a fantasy that keeps the lover’s love alive. But this non-existent sublime object can quickly turn into disgust, which is why love and hate are the two sides of the same coin.

Nonetheless, it is precisely with love dilemmas that we usually ask for advice and hope to get some guidance on how to tailor our choices.

Freud was once addressed by his friend who was uncertain whether to marry a particular woman. Freud's answer was that when it comes to the small matters in life one should think long and hard, but when it come to the big ones—to marry or not, whether to have children—one should just do them. This answer sounds profoundly pessimistic and it might be read in the context of the much more conservative society that Freud lived in. However, the same answer can also have a liberating effect if we embrace the fact that our choices when it comes to love and family matters are seldom rational. No matter how much we think we choose our direction in our lives rationally, it is our unconscious desires and drives which usually lead us into one direction or another.

If we look at some of the titles of bestselling books about love and especially dating, we can see that they all try to figure out how to employ choice in matters of love. Books with titles such as *How to Choose and Keep Your Partner*¹¹ or *Love is a Choice*¹² propagate the idea that there are quick rational solutions to the complicated question of seduction, and they try to figure out how to control desire of the other. The self-help market is flooded with books offering advice on how to make someone fall in love with you, how to prevent someone from leaving, and how to manipulate another so that he or she will give you what you want. It looks as if choice applies only to the person seeking advice and that there is no choice allowed for the prospective partner of this person.

Right now, choice in love seems to be especially problematic, since we are pursuing an ideal choice. The way people are constantly switching their mobile phone providers and always feeling that after they make a new choice they have again lost on a better deal from someone else is a pattern that also influences choices in love relationships.

The British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman¹³ was right to point out that we live in times of liquid love where long-term attachments are increasingly hard to make. Today's self-help industry sadly contributes to dissatisfaction in love by trying to offer step-by-step guidance on how to control rationally one's own and other people's emotions. But people also invent all kinds of ways of abdicating from choice when it comes to matters of love. One example is internet dating. While it might appear the ultimate experience of choice, many people are trying to limit their choice by using various tools to weed out the prospects. Many daters, for instance, heavily rely on horoscope compatibility with the people they are meeting on the internet.

¹¹ See MAEN T. MAREL, *HOW TO CHOOSE AND KEEP YOUR PARTNER* (1997).

¹² See ROBERT HEMFELT, FRANK MINIRTH & PAUL MEIER, *LOVE IS A CHOICE: THE DEFINITIVE BOOK ON LETTING GO OF UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS* (2003).

¹³ See ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, *LIQUID LOVE: ON THE FRAILITY OF HUMAN BONDS* (2003).

V. THE SEARCH FOR THE LIMIT

With little children one often finds a search for the limit. If there are too many possibilities to choose from, they often become agitated and uncertain and search for guidance from parents as to what they should choose. Even if they choose exactly the opposite of what their parents suggested, they find solace in not having to deal with limitless choice.

The very fact that we so often search for advice when we make our choices shows how crucial it is that the individual finds some safety net in a community—whether be it a virtual one or a real one. In today's society making choices has become a very lonely act. If in the past, people were more able to rely on their families or other groups when making choices, today we live in times of high individualism where one finds less support when dealing with life dilemmas. But people find new ways to search for advice. I noticed in the U.S. how many women in communal changing areas in department stores ask fellow shoppers for advice on whether to buy a particular piece of clothing. The answers of anonymous women are often very honest, much more than if the person asked were one's relative or friend. The latter's advice in regard to our choices might be heavily tinted with a desire not to cause hurt, with jealousy, or indeed simple boredom, while an anonymous adviser might feel quite flattered to be asked for an opinion and also be more honest, since there is no emotional attachment at stake.

*The New York Times*¹⁴ reported on Americans who ran up huge debt on their credit cards and found that one way of mending their ways was to start a personal blog in which the individual would honestly express his or her financial problems. A woman, for example, would not admit to her partner or to her friends that she was in debt, but after expressing her anxiety on her blog, she would slowly get the strength to cut down her spending and cut down the bills. When out shopping such a woman is able to fight her compulsion to spend by realizing that she will need to report the failure on her web page. In her mind the anonymous readers of her blog become guilt-inducing authorities, monitors. The nameless readers of a webpage are woven into her Superego, reinforcing it, and via this psychological detour into cyberspace the woman becomes far more capable of taking action than she would be by confiding in the people close to her, who fail to exert the same pressure. That she felt such action was necessary in the first place illustrates the weakness of her real—that is, her non-electronic—

¹⁴ See John Leland, *Debtors Search for Discipline Through Blogs*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 18, 2007, § 1.

community. It also shows how, when such communities lose their power both to support and to guide, choices became harder to make, which is why an individual in distress might find great solace (as well as pain) in compulsive, almost indiscriminate shopping.

When people are under so much pressure to be in charge of their lives, it is not surprising that they search for leaders (such as new-age and self-help gurus) to make choices for them. Identification with a master is often a way that an individual tries to deal with his or her anxiety. And searching for new knowledge or advice in books or on the internet is nowadays one of the ways to find such a master—even if only in the form of new scientific research.

But no matter how traumatic choice is, it is an essential human capacity. The fact that a person is able to make choices opens up the possibility of change. The problem today is that choice is very much perceived as rational choice and that our understanding of it as such is so much linked to economic theory and consumerism and, consequently, governed by such theory. Psychoanalysis, however, understands choice in a much broader way. The fact that psychoanalysis looks at a person as being responsible for his or her symptoms does not mean that a person has rationally chosen his or her suffering. Instead, it means that the person is perceived as a subject—i.e., as someone who always creates an individual symptom (or neurosis). This, however, also means that the person has the chance to overcome his or her suffering, i.e., that he or she can change.

CONCLUSION

Late capitalist ideology, with its insistence on self-making and self-fulfillment, increases people's anxiety, which in turn causes us to be more submissive, more self-focused, and less attentive to society around us. Today's capitalist society with its insistence on the idea of choice masks class difference, as well as racial and sexual inequality. Margaret Thatcher became famous for saying "There is no society. There are only individuals and their families." This view has sadly permeated all the pores of contemporary society. The feeling of guilt for being poor has replaced the fight against social injustice. And the anxiety that one is not good enough has pacified people so that they nowadays not only work longer hours in their jobs but often work equally hard at remaking themselves. Choice, however, also opens the possibility of change at the level of society. However, this can happen only if it ceases to be perceived as solely an individual matter.

Badiou rightly rejects the idea that in times of high individualism there is no possibility to think "we." He rejects the pessimistic view

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that today we only have individuals fighting for their own happiness, and that any active brotherhood is suspicious. He hopes that we can move from a unified “war-like we” of the last century to a new “we” that has in itself an immanent disparity, which however does not threaten it to collapse.

What is “we” in times of peace instead of war? How can we go from brotherhood “we” to disparate “we” without giving up on “we” altogether? Badiou’s conclusion is that on the answer to this question relies his own survival. I would conclude that on the answer to this question relies the survival of humanity as such. But the fact that we are not in any way coming close to this answer confirms another of Badiou’s points: that indifference is always a form of a reaction to the event. (Jacques Lacan similarly stressed that people do not have passion for knowledge, but rather passion for ignorance.)

Do we therefore experience new events in late capitalism? Badiou points out that event is always undecidable and that event is not a result of decisions. Owing to its extreme singularity we are unable to tell whether what appears to be happening actually is or not. Today we live under the illusion of the eternal present, as well as under the promise of the utter predictability of events. The desire for control of the events seems to be overwhelming. Whether subtle ideological changes that can be observed in late capitalism are demarcations of an event or not is something that we might be able to discern only in retrospect. However, one should also not forget Badiou’s ominous prediction that the risk of the event is also the risk of the lack of it.